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SETTING NEW DIRECTIONS

THE YUKON HEALTH ACT

Yukon
Health and Human Resources

TONY PENIKETT, MINISTER

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In January 1990, the Yukon government sent all households in the territory a publication entitled "The Yukon Health Act: Explaining the Proposed Principles." It targeted healthier communities as the overall goal for Yukon health care in the 1990s. It recognized that in order to meet this goal we, as Yukoners, need to improve all aspects of our well-being: physical, mental and social.

To help determine how these goals would be realized, the publication also set out six principles for a new Health Act.

- **Preventive Approach**

  Promoting healthy behaviour and preventing disease will form an important part of the Yukon's health care program.

- **Integration**

  In developing health and social services, the government will explore practical ways to better coordinate and integrate health, social, and education programs and services.

- **Partnership**

  A partnership with individuals, communities, and the government in health care decisions will be emphasized.

- **Accessibility**

  Equal access to high quality health care is a key principle upon which the total health care system will be built.

- **Cultural Sensitivity**

  The role of culture and traditional healing in contributing to the health of individuals and communities will be explored, to find its rightful place in the Yukon's health care system.

- **Accountability**

  The health care system will be responsive to the needs of Yukoners.

In their response to the publication, Yukoners have indicated that they support these principles. Now it is time to build on these principles and to shape new directions for our health care system that will take the Yukon into the 21st century.

From these principles, the government has developed objectives for the Yukon health care system and suggested actions towards achieving these objectives. These objectives and actions constitute a proposed agenda for health, a broad plan for setting new directions for our health care system and for a new Health Act.

The government plans to table the Health Act in the legislature in the fall of 1990. But before the government takes this step, it wants your views on the ideas proposed for the new act.

Preventive Approach

The Yukon government will ***place greater emphasis on preventing illness and promoting health in the Health Act.***

The Yukon government wants to strengthen activities that improve the health of individuals and communities, while maintaining services for the treatment of illnesses. To achieve this, the government proposes to:

- **Designate part of the overall health budget for preventing illness and promoting health**

  The government would progressively increase expenditures on health promotion to five or even ten percent of its annual health budget. Within this amount would be a new fund for approved prevention and promotion activities and services.

- **Encourage healthy lifestyles through information and education**

  The government believes that groups, individuals, and governments can help promote healthy lifestyles through information and education.

- **Develop health indicators to measure the health of the Yukon's population**

Health indicators would be based on data collected from throughout the Yukon. They would be released annually to the public in a report on the status of the overall health of the territory's residents. This information would help governments, communities, and health care practitioners address health problems, especially through preventive measures.

- **Appoint a Medical Officer of Health**

This officer would monitor health indicators and help develop new approaches to health care, particularly towards preventing illness.

Integration

The Yukon government will ***explore and implement practical ways of coordinating health, social services, justice, and education programs and resources within government and at the community level.***

The Yukon government has already made several specific commitments towards greater integration of health and other social services. In Mayo, for example, the government is participating in a community resource project that is exploring ways to better coordinate and. where feasible, integrate the local delivery of health, social, and educational services. A steering committee, made up of members selected jointly by the Na'cho Nyak Dun First Nation and the Village Council, is

overseeing the project. The government will continue its involvement with this project.

To further promote integration, it also proposes to:

- **Encourage the creation of community health centres**

  In its new Health Act, the government proposes to allow for the establishment of community health centres, which can offer integrated health and social services under the direction and management of a local governing structure. These centres would give communities a greater voice in what, and how, services are offered. They would also help to ensure the best use of available resources.

  The duties, powers, and structure of community health centres and their councils or boards would be broadly defined in the new Health Act. More detailed provisions, standards, and procedures would be outlined in regulations, policies, and agreements for funding.

- **Explore the most appropriate ways of delivering health care services, especially long term care**

  The Health Act could require that government regularly examine the needs of long term care patients. This would involve exploring options that provide the least institutional and most humane care while still meeting a person's needs.

Partnership

The Yukon government will ***work with communities, organizations, and individuals in addressing the territory's health needs.***

The government wants to encourage, and enable, individuals, organizations, and communities to each take an active role in addressing the territory's health needs.

A commitment to good health must involve all these parties, in partnership with government, if it is to result in meaningful improvements in the health of the Yukon's population. To work towards this partnership, the government proposes to:

- **Work with community agencies to increase, and improve, the options for delivering health care services at the local level**

  The government would work with the new Health and Social Services Council and community health centres to examine ways of strengthening health care delivery in the communities.

- **Examine ways to encourage individuals to choose a healthier lifestyle**

  Chronic diseases, such as cancer or cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses, are often caused by lifestyle and environment. Through

contributions from the budget for health promotion and disease prevention, the government can help prevent these diseases by supporting individual and community efforts to address their causes.

Accessibility

The Yukon government ***will provide high quality health care that is accessible and affordable.***

The Yukon government will ensure that all Yukoners have an equal opportunity to receive the health care they need. To achieve this objective, the government proposes to:

- **Develop regulations under the Health Act that define reasonable and appropriate standards for access to health services**

  These regulations could, for example, state that one large regional hospital would provide advanced medical services to the whole Yukon. They could define what level of services should be available in all communities of a particular size and a particular distance from Whitehorse. They could also outline what kinds of services should be available to people within a certain period of time.

- **Regularly review requirements for residency and eligibility for health care services**

This review would help ensure that Yukon requirements more closely reflect those existing in other jurisdictions across Canada. It would also help ensure access to health programs is fair to all Yukon residents.

Cultural Sensitivity

The Yukon government will ***deliver health care that respects cultural values and promotes traditional aboriginal healing and health practices.***

To ensure the Yukon's health care system reflects and responds to cultural values, the government proposes to:

- **Encourage adaptations in health care and services that are sensitive to the culture and traditions of patients**

  This could involve recognizing the value of country food in promoting individual health and providing interpretive services for patients, where appropriate, so they can better understand the medical procedures they are undergoing.

- **Explore ways to expand public awareness and understanding of the role that traditional Indian healing and medicine can play in people's health**

  Yukoners have indicated they want to learn about Indian healing

methods and medicine. To support this interest, the government could foster a dialogue between traditional healers and the medical community and develop public information and education programs.

- **Encourage Indian people to obtain training and participate in the delivery of health care**

The Department of Health and Human Resources could work with Yukon College and community health centres to develop relevant training programs for Indian people. This would help to ensure there are trained people to work in the communities.

Accountability

The Yukon government is committed to ***a system of health care that is accountable to Yukoners and makes the best of available resources.***

The Yukon government wants a health care system that responds to the needs of, and is accountable to, its clients -- the people of the Yukon. In the face of rising health costs, it also needs to be fiscally responsible. To improve accountability, the government proposes to:

- **Use health indicators to forecast and plan for future health care needs**

Health indicators, based on territory-wide data, would help to

identify health trends. Careful analysis of these trends would increase the government's ability to make the most effective use of existing resources in responding to new health care needs.

- **Establish a committee to address ethical questions facing the health care system**

The government proposes to establish this committee under the new Health Act. It could include doctors, lawyers, members of the clergy, aboriginal healers, and lay people.

- **Set up a process to review medical technologies and programs**

This process, which would involve doctors and nurses, would ensure that there is a solid review of new technologies and programs before decisions are taken to incorporate them into the Yukon's health care system.

- **Ensure the effectiveness of health and health-related programs can be measured and evaluated**

Audits and evaluations of the quality of program results are methods of determining whether health care programs are meeting the needs of Yukoners in the most effective manner.

- **Ensure Yukoners have the opportunity to review and**

comment on major government policies and programs with implications for health care and social services

The Health and Social Services Council, established by the Yukon goverment, is one means of ensuring effective public consultation on the future of health and social services in the Yukon. Its mandate could be set out in the new Health Act.

YOUR COMMENTS

Creating a healthier Yukon will not happen overnight. It is a long-term goal that will require that all of us -- government, communities, groups, and individuals -- to work together to realize its benefits.

But the new Yukon Health Act is an important step towards this goal.

Because it requires the collective commitment of all Yukoners, the government wants your comments on the actions proposed in this paper.

Please write or phone us by June 30, 1990, so we can consider all your comments during preparation of the Health Act.

Phone or write:

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APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED IN RESPONSE TO "THE YUKON HEALTH ACT: EXPLAINING THE PROPOSED PRINCIPLES"

More than 260 written responses to this publication were received by May 1990. The following is a summary of the comments received and the predominant themes that emerged from them.

Almost all the responses stated that good health means more to them than simply the absence of disease. It includes physical, social, mental, and for many, spiritual well-being.

The responses voiced strong support for strengthening illness prevention and health promotion as part of the health care system. In their view, health care should include information and services on promoting health and preventing illness, as well as medical treatment services.

Opinions varied about who should be responsible for promoting healthy lifestyles. Many responses mentioned that individuals must be more actively responsible for their own health. More than half the respondents supported government taking an active role in promoting healthy lifestyles, but recommended that, where possible, legislation and regulation should be avoided.

A large majority of the people who responded strongly supported universal access to quality health services. This is in keeping with the sentiments of Canadians across the country.

About one-half of those who responded felt they received high quality care from the Yukon's health system, while about one-third felt the quality of care could be better.

A significant number of respondents cautioned that our standards for the level of the services available and for access to services must be "reasonable," given the size and distribution of the Yukon's population. Several responses expressed concern about increasing costs and spending on health care.

Many responses called for an expanded range of participants in the health care system.

A small minority of responses called for the return of health care insurance premiums. Some wanted to pay a set premium; others suggested that people with "self-inflicted injuries" (e.g., conditions directly related to drinking or smoking) should pay a proportionately higher premium.

Finally, although most people said they had little or no experience with aboriginal healing practices, two-thirds of the respondents said they wanted to know more about these practices.